

Increase Your Connection to Nature!

As a species, humans have an inherent affinity for nature. This innate and often subconscious desire to affiliate with nature is called biophilia. Over the course of hundreds of thousands of years, the human mind, body and senses have evolved in close proximity to nature. However, the cultural shift towards living in cities and the more recent boom in technology have led to less exposure to nature than ever before, with the average human spending about 90% of their time indoors. Studies have shown there are many benefits associated with re-incorporating nature into our daily lives. A few benefits include reduced stress, lowered blood pressure, enhanced morale, increased attention span and reduced mental fatigue.^{1,2} The simplest way to reap these benefits is to simply spend more time outdoors. However, there are many strategies for adding some nature to the time we must spend indoors. Here are a few ideas:

- **Add plants to your workspace.** Plants are the easiest way to bring nature into our work spaces and many plant species require very little maintenance to maintain. A few examples of common house/office plants are:
 - Aloe – easy to grow with very little water need
 - Philodendron – often used in hanging baskets or with a support pole.
 - African Violet – require moderate sunlight, but provide a colorful bloom
 - Snake Plant – a tough and slow-growing plant requiring very little maintenance
 - Spider Plant – prefers only occasional watering and needs very little light
- **Introduce a photograph of a nature scene.** Since we can't always be surrounded by nature, sometimes we can fake it. A landscape of a tranquil meadow or a trickling stream can help reproduce the effects of being there in-person. You could also consider setting one of these images as your desktop background!
- **Incorporate natural light.** Many buildings at the NIH use natural light to reduce energy consumption. However, these features have other benefits that can directly impact the building occupants. Experiencing the natural changes in light intensity throughout the day is very beneficial for establishing your body's circadian rhythm. Natural exposure helps with this, as can adjusting the intensity and/or frequency of artificial light throughout the day to mimic the sun. Even a short walk can reap the benefits of natural light if it is not available in your workspace.
- **Add the presence of water.** The sight of flowing water, along with the accompanying sound, help us feel more connected to nature. There are many desk ornaments that incorporate water



African Violet



Spider Plant



into their design that you could bring into the office. Likewise, the recorded sound of flowing water is widely available in many forms, such as a slow stream or the ocean waves.

- **Use sounds and smells to replicate nature.** Stimulating our senses can help trick our brains into believing we are interacting with nature. As mentioned above, one way to do this is by listening to the sound of running water. However, there are many other nature sounds that are equally beneficial:

crickets chirping, a gentle rainfall or birds singing in a forest, for example. It is also possible to stimulate your sense of smell, such as with a floral fragrance.

- **Improve airflow.** Our brain can interpret airflow as a natural breeze, which can trick our brains into believing we are outside. If allowed, consider adding a small fan to your desk to create a gentle airflow.

